



Miss Perfect by cinnamon and apples

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Summary: When one of Nancy Wheeler's old friends bumps into a heartbroken Steve Harrington one night at Hawkins High, she finds herself unexpectedly confiding in him after being shaken up by the sighting of a Californian bad boy from her past. Then, in an effort to protect her, Steve pulls her into the world of monsters known to some as the Upside Down.(Set in Season 2)(Written by:cinnamon)

1. Chapter One - The Heartbroken King

Chapter One – The Heartbroken King

It's 5:00 on a Friday night, and I, Jessica Harrison, am rummaging through my locker at Hawkins High collecting my textbooks for the weekend's hours of homework, just as I do every Friday night at 5:00. I have hung around for as long as I could, hiding away in the library to escape into the fantasy of my latest novel of choice for nearly two hours. The bell has rung, signaling the end of various after-school sports practices, and the doors will be locked soon. Unless I want to be stuck in the school for two days, I need to get out.

Closing my locker door with a slam, I sling my bag over my shoulder and turn right, heading in the general direction of the front entrance, when I'm stopped in my tracks by the vision that is Steve Harrington. He is walking towards me with his head down, hair dripping as the result of a recent shower. He must have had basketball practice again.

I haven't spoken to Steve since he started dating Nancy Wheeler; since he started hanging around Tommy and Carol. Now, Steve wasn't really speaking to any of them. He was different, but so was Nancy. Nancy and I used to be close before she started spending every minute of her life with Steve, or if not Steve, Barb; poor Barb. We had stopped talking until yesterday out of the blue when she had called me in the morning to tell me about the Halloween party; her run-in with Steve in the bathroom, and I had encouraged her to go to him and speak her mind. I suppose I had even expected the aftermath. Part of me had never really felt that she and Steve would work out in the end, and as Nancy grew closer to Jonathan Byers, I realized why.

Steve is now standing in front of me, blinking. Damn it, I've been staring, daydreaming this whole time and he's caught me.

"Hey, Jessie." Quietly, he breaks the silence, surprising me by even taking the time to talk.

"Hey, Steve," I smile up at him, almost apologetically, like it's my

fault that Nancy broke it off with him. I know I have nothing to do with it, but I can't help feeling a little bad for encouraging her, after overhearing the end of their conversation yesterday. Steve had fallen in with the wrong crowd, but had distanced himself since last year, and was trying to fix himself up, for both him and for Nancy, as far as I could tell. He loved her, a feeling that proved not to be mutual. Nancy still blamed herself, and Steve, for Barb's disappearance.

"You know... I heard you yesterday, you and Nancy when you should have been in basketball practice." I mutter cautiously. His face falls, and he motions as if he's going to push past me, but stops when I open my mouth again.

"I'm sorry, Steve. I know you really cared for her," he just nods, "but will hear me out for a second?"

He looks up at me with glossy eyes and nods again. He wouldn't let me speak if he didn't want me to.

"I don't think she's the one for you, Steve." I choke out. The sight of this "King" in front of me, crushed, is utterly devastating. He is a different boy, and it hurts me to think that it took Barb's disappearance and the subsequent loss of his first real love to drive him to this change. Ultimately though, I think he's changing for the better, like the breaking of his heart has caused it to grow. He looks down at me like I've driven a dagger through his heart myself, but holds my gaze.

"After all, she is Miss... P-Perfect." My voice drops to a whisper as I glance away from his heartbroken face down the hall, to the most unexpected and unpleasant sight imaginable; California's bad boy.

Author's Notes: Thank you for reading the first chapter of the first fanfic I have ever written on my own! Please leave a review to let me know what you thought.

Stranger Things is such an engaging fictional world to explore, so a big thank you goes to the Duffer Brothers. The world belongs to you, I am but a fangirl borrowing your ideas.

2. Chapter Two - Emotional Confusion

Chapter Two – Emotional Confusion

Unconsciously, I have stepped closer to Steve, reached out, grabbed his hand, and crushed it in my own in my overwhelming fear. Registering this, I hastily retreat, pulling my hand away and running down the hall in the opposite direction. Tears burn in my eyes, blurring my sight, and the ringing in my head muffles the sound of Steve yelling after me.

"Jessie! Jessie! What happened? Jessie! Jessie!"

Bursting through the doors heading out towards the back field, I collapse onto the stairs breathing heavily. Seconds later, Steve is sitting next to me, the sorrow in his eyes replaced with alarm.

"Jessie, what happened? What did you see?"

I'm not even sure if I can form full sentences, but I have to try. I haven't told anyone about last summer's California adventure; last summer's mistake.

"D-Did you see the guy down the hall? The blonde?" My eyebrows crinkle and I blink to hold back the tears that threaten to pour.

"Yeah, yeah that asshole? That's Billy, you know, the new kid from California." Steve merely shrugs, but I blanch as my stomach drops to the floor.

"H-He's really here? No, no, no, no, no!"

"You know him?" Steve's eyes widen. To him, "Billy" is just another self-important new kid.

"Yes," I whisper, my head hanging. I can't look at Steve anymore. If I meet his big brown eyes again, I'll break down. Here I was thinking that I was going to be the one giving him an inspirational "there are plenty of fish in the sea" speech and rekindle our friendship. Now I'm sitting next to him on the back stairs, confronted by my own relationship problems.

"Hey," his voice is low, concerned, and consoling now. I don't think he's used this tone with anyone but Nancy for a long time.

"What has he done to you?"

Then the floodgates open, and I am weeping. My head in my hands, I lean against the cold metal railing next to me, chest heaving as I struggle to breathe.

"Hey, hey." He shifts closer to me, resting a hand on my back, and the feel of him touching me is enough to send me even farther down into my pit of emotional confusion. This is too much. I want him here with me, but I am supposed to be the one comforting him, not the other way around.

Suddenly I realize we are out in the open, and I know that I have to stop crying before anyone sees us and this gets a whole lot worse for the both of us. Regaining my composure, I catch my breath and lift my head from my hands, as I become very aware of Steve's hand still warm and present on my back. He regards me with a bewildered gaze when I peek over at him, but I'm the one who's surprised. Just as I think he is about to stand and walk away, he pulls me to him. Wrapping his arms around me, he holds my head to his chest. After an untold amount of time, Steve shifts.

"Come on, stand up." He whispers, placing his hands on either side of my face, and holding me as if I'm about to fall apart as we stand together on the stairs.

"I know we've had our differences, Jessie, I know I've been distant with you for a while, and I know I'm probably the last person you want to share your secrets with, but you need to tell me what is going on." He's being serious, looking at me expectantly and dropping his hands into his pockets, but keeping the distance between us close. Then he chuckles as if remembering a bad joke. I think he's trying to lighten the mood; encourage me to open up.

"Do you know what he said to me, not twenty minutes ago?" He shakes his head, seemingly in disbelief.

"Plenty of bitches in the sea."

I chuckle back. That sounds like something California boy would say, and I'm glad I didn't get the chance to declare the whole "plenty of fish in the sea" thing earlier.

"That there are,"

Steve lifts an eyebrow at me.

"There are plenty of bitches in the sea, but there of also plenty of nice girls. Don't worry I know you're more into those." I smile shyly at him, not entirely sure why I'm blushing. He's just as vulnerable as I am at present, and it dawns on me that he's the only one I have to talk to right now. After a moment of silence, I speak.

"He hurt me, Steve."

3. Chapter Three - Last Summer's Mistake

Chapter Three – Last Summer's Mistake

"How?" Steve's voice is dangerously low. I swallow, preparing myself to recall the events of last summer that I have been trying every day since, to forget.

"We met in California."

Under the cool shade of a bright red beach umbrella, I lay flat on my stomach across a white towel. Propping my head up and kicking my feet, I gaze out into the sparkling ocean beyond the masses of people around me. I am wearing far too little; just a one piece and big sunglasses, and much to my surprise, I have actually caught some sun over the past few days. I look good, far better than I feel.

My ditzy Aunt Sheila had dragged me along with her to "The Golden State of California" for a week. Her equally empty-headed new boyfriend, Kenneth, supposedly had friends here, and she had jumped and giggled at the mention of the sun and the sand. The two of them spent their days drunkenly canoodling, as they always did; ignoring me at every opportunity. I couldn't help but feel like neither of them deserved the luxury of relaxation. They could have just left me at home, it honestly would have been easier for everyone, but now I find myself thankful for the change of scenery. Hawkins is going crazy, and California is far enough west to be considered an escape.

Even so, I've had enough of an escape for the day, and I'm ready to go back to our disgusting motel room. Shelia and Ken won't even notice if I leave now; we are heading back to Hawkins tomorrow, and they've made their intention to take advantage of time very clear. Rolling up my towel, I stand and brush myself off. I'm getting self-conscious of my state of dress and I need my shirt, so I begin my journey back in the direction of Ken's car. To my displeasure, I have to walk halfway across the beach and weave through sweaty throngs of people to get there. When I'm about ten steps away, I notice someone approaching me, glistening and shirtless.

His hair... well, his dirty blonde mullet could be better, but his face is pretty, really pretty, and he's stalking towards me like a wolf would its prey. Frozen in place, I swallow, brushing my hair out of my face in an attempt to compose myself as he gets closer.

"Hey, Miss Perfect," he smirks at me, his low voice tugging a blush up my neck.

"Where do you think you're going?" The head rush inducing look in his blue eyes hasn't left, and the extended sight of it pushes me to take a chance with him. If he hadn't approached me, I would just be walking back to a grimy motel room to sit alone anyway.

"Where do you want to take to me?" My voice is small and I can't believe what I've just said. The dangerous air about this boy is intoxicating.

"Good answer." He purrs, and my stomach sinks, out of fear or excitement I don't know.

The sun is setting by the time we get to what I assume is his place. He's brought some friends along, and no one is home. As soon as we're through the door, he heads to the fridge and grabs two beers, one for me, and one for himself. His friends, in all appearances a couple, have disappeared into the bathroom, and through the door, I can hear the all too familiar sounds of them getting horizontal. I shouldn't, but I take the can offered to me and drink quickly. I've drunk beer before, this isn't new.

After my second can, I'm starting to feel fuzzy, giggly, and confident, while sitting on a worn-out sofa with bad boy's arm draped around me. Having drunken much more than me, he's leering at me expectantly, smiling in an almost charming way, and I just giggle. He looks funny, and even prettier this way, all dirty and eager.

Standing up, he takes my hand and pulls me into a back room, his bedroom. It's in disarray, messier than he is, but still more inviting than Ken's dingy motel room. Wading through the clothes and cans that are scattered on the floor, he pushes me hard against the wall, holding my hands firmly at my sides, and leers down at me again

before attaching my mouth with his own. He tastes of alcohol, cigarettes, sweat, and what I guess is simply him. I can't decide if I like the mix, but I reciprocate anyway, right now I just want to get lost.

"You are so bad." He growls, voice hoarse, and his hands begin to travel away from my arms to rest on my hips. I shiver at the feeling of him exploring uncharted territory but can do nothing more. My hands remain against the wall as his lips and tongue become relentless.

Then, with no warning at all, he has slipped a hand up the bottom of my blue and white striped one piece. Before I can register what I'm doing, I rip my lips away from his and strike him hard across the face.

"Bitch!" he yells, pulling away from me completely and placing a hand on his now red cheek. I am stunned, yet relieved that I know my limits, even in a drunken state. I have decided that I no longer want to get lost with this Californian bad boy. I do not like the taste of him, and I do not want him to touch me again, anywhere.

"Get your hands off me you scumbag!" I seethe.

"Excuse me?"

"I don't want to play anymore."

"Sure, you don't," his grin is devilish. He's almost laughing.

"No! I said get your hands off of me!" I push him with both hands, but he backs up only slightly. He grabs one of my wrists and uses his other hand to take his own swing at me. I scream at the stinging impact across my cheek and kick at his shins. He releases my wrist, but just as I think I'm free to push against him and move towards the doorway of the living room, he grabs a hold of me again. He snakes one arm around my waist, while his other hand seizes my neck and he leans in much too close to my face. The tightening grip on my neck has me fearing for my life and fighting for air.

"You see, my friends and I... we made a bet, just a couple bucks that I

could get with you by the end of the night. You really want me to lose my bet? We've already touched second base." His breath is hot, seemingly thicker with alcohol now, and I am burning with rage. Instinctively, I knee him where it hurts with all the strength I can muster. I'm briefly disappointed that I didn't do that earlier when he falls to the floor.

Horried, I flee into the living room to snatch my towel from the sofa; it's the only thing I've brought with me from the beach, having never made it back to Ken's car. Bad boy is cursing and scrambling to follow me, crashing into the walls under the influence of alcohol and the pain of my blow. By some miracle, I manage to burst through his screen door before he reaches me. I run barefooted down the dimly lit street with tears streaming down my cheeks, my head no longer fuzzy. Silently, I pray that I can remember the way back to the motel from here, and thank whatever God there may be that I am leaving California tomorrow morning. I will never have to see that greasy scumbag again.

4. Chapter Four - The Meaning of Perfect

Chapter Four – The Meaning of Perfect

"They bet on me, Steve! Like some stupid racehorse! Tell me he didn't see me! Tell me he didn't see me running away again!" I'm nearly weeping once more while my voice cracks and I flail my arms.

"I don't think he saw you. If he saw either of us, he would've followed us out here." Steve's eyes are wide and glossy with concern as he shakes his head. He's still standing in front of me.

"If he didn't see me, he doesn't know I'm here. He doesn't know my name." I blink.

"I knew there was a new guy from California, I even knew his name was Billy, but I didn't know *his* name was Billy. I've been distancing myself from everything and everyone at this school for so long that before today, I hadn't even seen the illustrious new guy, but it's him... it's really him. I will never forget his horrible mullet, his sweaty chest, or the burning look in his eyes. I think he wanted me to fight him. I think he enjoyed himself. I was drunk and alone in California..." I trail off as if that's even an excuse.

"I'm going to find that asshole and beat him within an inch of his life." Steve's voice is dangerously low again, he's turned away from me now, and he's marching purposefully towards his magnificent red BMW.

"Steve! Where are you going? Steve!" I hurry after him, but he keeps marching, staring straight ahead as he yells back to me.

"You know, he's been a douchebag from day one, and-and honestly, this is getting personal. He started some rivalry with me when he broke my keg standing record at the Halloween party, and he goes out of his way to taunt me about Nancy, and how much better he is than me at basketball."

"I don't even really care about the fame, but that's all Billy cares about. He has no respect for anyone but himself and accepts no

responsibility for his actions. It's all some game to him. Billy needs to know what it feels like to be on the losing team. That's the only place he should be after what he did to you." Steve moves swiftly with growing determination.

After everything that's happened in this town, the little involvement he's had in the chaos, Steve wants to help me. He wants to protect me. If he fights Billy; tries his hand at getting his point across, and succeeds, Steve won't just be protecting me, he will be protecting all the girls at Hawkins High from becoming Billy's next victim. This would not be an easy fight to win. I sadly wonder if he's trying to make up for something.

"No! Steve! He'll kill you." I'm begging as I follow close behind him. As much as I want to see Billy get his just desserts, I would rather see Steve alive tomorrow.

He stops a pace away and turns to face me again, hanging his head. He is remembering the aftermath of his fight with Jonathan, just as I am until he blinks up at me. The look in his eyes that I can't place tells me that he's thinking about something else.

"He called you Miss Perfect." Steve shakes his head in disbelief, just like before.

"Only because I was practically naked," I retort, "perfect girls, the too good to be true girls, they're not his type. Whatever perfect means, I'm far from it, Steve." After a breath, I risk continuing.

"Nancy isn't perfect either. I think we both know that." I mumble, recalling how I had referred to her by Tommy's stupid nickname. Steve sighs in exasperation, running a hand through his now dry and quite ironically, perfect hair, and pivots, carrying on in the direction of his car. In a last-ditch attempt to get my point across, I call after him.

"Maybe Miss Perfect is subjective."

He faces me one last time, holding open his door and waiting for me to clarify my statement.

"Maybe Nancy isn't Miss Perfect, not because she isn't flawless, but because she isn't perfect for you."

On my way home, I pass by the neighbour's house, the Byers' residence, and notice that while Joyce's car is in the driveway, Jonathan's is missing for the second evening in a row. This is strange, even for him, but I quickly brush off my suspicions. What hasn't been strange about this town lately?

As I fumble through my front door, my thoughts linger on Jonathan Byers. Jonathan Byers, I had been his neighbour for most of my adolescent life, and part of me had always thought I would end up with him. After all, he was the boy next door, he was the same age, and he was quiet.

Ultimately though, it was his quietness, along with all the other ways in which we were similar, that kept me from attempting a less than platonic relationship with him. I enjoyed, and still enjoy, the friendly relationship we share, and would never want to cross a line and jeopardize that. We respect each other, and to some degree understand one another's tendencies. Neither of us likes most people, but as far as I can tell, we like each other.

We smile and wave in passing, be that at school; where the darkroom is almost exclusively ours, or while out and around our neighbourhood. We have even exchanged a few brief conversations on the occasions he has stopped by Melvald's General Store while I was working with his mother.

Jonathan is a freak, like me. I am nearly as introverted as him, spending my days listening to music, reading, and taking pictures; only I am not just an introvert. I am the quiet freak that gets straight A's. I push myself to be my very best to prove that I am better than the people that brought me up. That, and I used to dabble in the parties, albeit small ones, and drink, but I never smoked.

Also unlike Jonathan, I had never put Steve Harrington on my "people I don't like" list. I just didn't understand his habits; the girls, the kegs, and the rowdy parties. As Steve's reputation grew, I became more and more interested in his lifestyle. What was it about him that

made all the girls swoon? Nancy had mentioned that Steve had had at least three girlfriends, all of which he had shared noncommittal sexual relationships. So, he was a bit of a playboy. Did I want to be a part of something this wild? Did I want to swim in the Harrington's expensive pool, or test the waters of downright recklessness? Was I attracted to the idea of Steve's lifestyle or the "King" himself?

Then, Steve started dating Nancy around the time my Father died, Steve and Nancy shut me out, and I shut myself out from everyone else. I only talked to people when I needed to. I became an outcast.

Over the course of 96 hours in early November 1983, both of my parents left me; closing a door on a part of my life behind them as they did. Up until my Father's death, though my parents were seldom there for me, the daughter in me recognized they were still there. They were still around, even when coming together as a family, coming home, had never been a realistic option.

As far as I knew, my Mother had only ever considered my Father a burden. Since I was a baby, he had been incapable of independence. My Father had lost his mind, sacrificed it to a faulty drug trial, and found himself trapped in a wheelchair. Breathing, but lifeless, he depended on my Mother for everything. After a while she could no longer take care of both my Father and me, so she sent me off to her sister's. Then one cold day years later, she abandoned my Father, giving up on him completely. Three days after that, he died. When he left, he took with him my spontaneity and my sense of adventure. Now, there really was no option to go home. There was no home.

My Aunt Sheila has put a roof over my head for years, but her house is not a home. If "home is where the heart is", my heart is lost. Maybe that's what I need... someone daring enough to help me find myself again. Someone to help me find my spontaneity, my sense of adventure, my heart, my home. Suddenly it hits me and my stomach knots. I am heartbroken and alone... like Steve. Steve and I share the experience of heartbreak and loneliness like Jonathan and Nancy share the experience of losing someone and the feeling that they were responsible.

In my eyes, it is Jonathan and Nancy's shared trauma that makes their relationship that much stronger than Nancy's relationship ever

was with Steve. Despite that, Nancy had evidently rubbed off on Steve. He was seemingly not just the reckless and popular jock anymore. Shockingly, he wanted to stand up for me. Why did he want to protect me? Does he need someone to protect? Does he need someone to care for because he knows what it's like not to be cared for? I am aware of the kind of family life Steve comes from, and his poor relationship with his "asshole" father.

Just an hour ago, the usually confident and cool "King" Steve Harrington, had not appeared at my locker, but rather a broken, friendless man with glossy eyes, supposedly willing to let me in. Had Steve been vulnerable around anyone before? Yes, Nancy... that's who Nancy was to Steve. She was the girl who listened to him in a way no one had before. That's why Steve had been vulnerable with me; he didn't have Nancy anymore, and in one of the rare moments when he was weak and insecure, he had found me, just as broken, and willing to listen.

Maybe I need someone willing to listen, someone to unburden myself to, someone to make the nightmares of life more livable.

5. Chapter Five - Back Against the Wall

Chapter Five - Back Against the Wall

I am back in my striped one piece, barefoot and wandering alone under a starless sky. I'm in Hawkins, and I'm shivering; freezing and fearful. Eventually, I stagger through the entrance to my Aunt's house among the trees, and mindlessly drift towards my bedroom. The petrifying sight beyond the door stops me in my tracks. My father is sitting in his wheelchair at the foot of my bed with my mother hovering over his left shoulder. Both of them are staring blankly at me. They can't be here it's not possible; I'm drunk, I have to be drunk! Seemingly in response to my denial, they begin to fade into the darkness.

Letting go of the breath I didn't know I was holding, I rest hesitantly down on the edge of my bed and fall back. My head hits the pillow and my eyes shut tightly, yet when I try to steady my breathing and regain my composure, I can't breathe at all. I blink wildly, and my hands pull hopelessly at the tightening force around my neck. It's a snake, I recognize it as the pet of one of Shelia's former boyfriends. Smooth, strong, and cold, it coils around me and my ears ring loudly as I am slowly drained of life.

I wake with a start, jolting upright as I gasp for air and paw at my neck. I'm alive, I'm awake, but the ringing in my ears persists. The phone on my side table is ringing, the sound of which is shrill and aggravating. I had gone to bed early in an attempt to catch up on the sleep I had lost since Friday night. It's 10:14 pm on Sunday, so Shelia must be calling me for the third night in a row to tell me that she won't be coming home, she's staying with Ken, and she "loves and misses me". Yeah sure. Sourly, I pick up the phone just before it is about to sound for the last time.

"Yeah, I know you're not coming home, Shelia. It's been three days. You don't even really live here anymore, so it makes no difference to me whether you come home or not. I'm more than capable of taking care of myself. Can you say the same?" I slam the phone down in frustration before she can respond.

Immediately, it rings again and I let out a sigh of irritation. I can't

deal with this, but I may as well answer her. I can leave the phone off the hook and move into another room until she hangs up. It's not like she will even remember this tomorrow. Reluctantly, I put the phone to my ear again.

"Jessie!" A male voice yells, and I pull the receiver away from my face, caught off guard.

"Yeah, it's me."

"Oh my god, Jessie! It's back, you're not safe, I need-you need to come here, to the Byer's, right now!" The male voice is Steve, he's terrified, he's next door at the Byer's, where I thought he'd never show his face, and he's begging me to come over for my own safety. Just when I thought things couldn't get any stranger.

"What is going on? Steve, do you know what time it is?"

"Jesus, Jessie! Just get your ass over here!" It's his turn to hang up before I can retort.

Looks like I'm not catching up on my sleep tonight. How did Steve even remember where I live? If this is some sick attempt at a rebound hookup, he's dead, but I'll show up and humour him anyway. If he really is next door, I'll be there and back in five minutes. I don't even need to put on clothes. I'm sure he'll get a kick out of that. Dropping my feet to the floor, I stand and make my way through the house to the entryway. I pause only to pull on socks, stuff my feet into my Converse, and throw on my denim jacket over my pastel pink teddy.

As soon as leaves and dirt from the Byer's driveway are crunching beneath my feet, Steve is bursting through the front door, racing towards me.

"Jessie! Oh my god! Jessie, what are you..." He speaks with panic and relief that melts into confusion and shock as he moves to stand in front of me. Shamelessly, he checks me out, his eyes drinking me in before meeting my gaze. Steve remains in his jeans and he's wondering why I have arrived in my nightwear, but either to my relief or my disappointment, that seems the lesser of his concerns.

Before I can comment, he grips my arm and tugs me towards the side of the Byer's house across from the shed. Then, he places his hands on my shoulders and pushes my back up against the wall. Can anyone see us here in the dark? Steve hovers over me, his panic contagious, yet I feel unexpectedly safe in the close proximity.

"It's back, they're back, there's more, and-and th-they're different now. They don't stand on two legs, they're like dogs. They are coming, and when they do, they will kill us." Steve's voice is unwavering but his eyes are wide, and his body is nearly shaking with fear. My eyebrows raise and I struggle to breathe. I have no idea what the hell he is talking about.

Steve blanches and steps back, "Shit, you don't know!"

"No! No, I don't Steve! Why did you call me?"

He blinks at me, trying to determine whether or not to fill me in or leave me in the dark. Then all of a sudden, I don't know whether it's my lack of sleep, my awareness of Steve and I alone together in the dark, or the anxiety that emanates off of him, but I dive off the deep end.

"Why did you call *me*, Steve?" I plead with him, tears stinging the back of my eyes.

"Do you even realize that before Friday, you hadn't spoken to me in over a year? You used to smile at me in the hall! You used to wave at me in passing! I don't know if that was just to show Nancy that you could care about her friends, or if you actually cared about me, but at least you pretended. That was before you started hanging around Tommy and Carol, and you fell into your fantasy world where you became "King Steve"! Basketball star, beer chugging, party throwing, lady's man, "King Steve!" Why did you even follow me out of the school on Friday night? Why did you call me, Steve? Why did you call me?" I am nearly sobbing now, and he is paralyzed by my outburst until he raises his voice to match my own.

"Because Nancy ran off with Jonathan! I and mean really ran off! They skipped fourth period on Thursday, they didn't show on Friday, and then neither of them were home!" He sighs, exasperated.

"How did you know neither of them were home?" My voice is back at its usual volume. Steve sighs again, he'd rather not tell me.

"I went to Nancy's earlier, but instead of her, I found Dustin. He claimed Nancy wasn't home, none of his friends were home, and I figured if anyone had heard Dustin's radio calls they would have responded, including Jonathan." With one hand on his hip and the other across his face, Steve stands a few paces closer than he had a minute ago.

Had Steve called because he had felt alone? He clearly hadn't been by himself this whole time. Before I had fallen asleep, I had noticed Jonathan's car was still missing from the driveway, but it's back where it should be now, along with the chief's car, and another car that looks vaguely familiar. I think it might be Joyce's new boyfriend's. However, Steve's car is nowhere to be seen. How did he get here? When did Jonathan get home? Somehow, Steve had arrived at the Byer's residence, with who knows how many other people. If Dustin had been looking for Mike, who is both Nancy's brother and Will Byer's best friend, where was he? Where was Will? Had Steve found them? Had he found Jonathan and Nancy?

"How do you know Jonathan and Nancy ran off together?"

"Tommy told me, I just didn't want to believe him."

"Until you found them together?"

"Until I found them together." Steve's head hangs, and I can't decide on the next question to ask before he raises his voice again.

"What the hell am I sorry for? Every time I try to apologize to this girl, I end up fighting demons! Literal demons, Jessie!" He shouts, and the glossy eyed boy from Friday is back again, along with my devastation for him.

"Not just your own," I mumble before I can register that I have even opened my mouth. Steve grimaces and turns away from me.

"Shit, I'm sorry." I could have honestly said anything else.

"No, no I shouldn't have called you." He scoffs, shaking his head,

pushing past me, and lifting his hand in a wave encouraging me to get lost.

"No," I speak firmly, as I remember Friday night and how he had held me after I stopped crying, how serious he was when he asked me for my story, and how upset he was after I told it.

"No?" He turns back to me like he can't comprehend the meaning of the word.

"You should have called me. Do you remember what you said to me on Friday night? "I know I've been distant with you for a while, and I know I'm probably the last person on Earth you want to share your secrets with right now, but you need to tell me what is going on." You need to tell me what is going on."

"I don't have time to explain everything, not now, this is crazy! You have to believe me. When they find us, they will kill us. We need to go back inside." Steve clenches a fist and looks around frantically like he's dropped something that he should be carrying. When he can't find whatever it is he's looking for, he settles on grabbing my arm again and dragging me back to the front porch steps.

Steve had called me knowing I was next door and I would come running. In some sideways attempt to protect me from the madness of Hawkins, he had pulled me from my hellish slumber and led me straight into its mouth. I'm here with him now, and there is no turning back. I realize that if he really has good intentions, if he really wants to keep me safe, then I want to return the favour. If no one else, we will have each other.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for the reviews!

6. Chapter Six - Kill or Be Killed

Disclaimer: This chapter contains direct quotes from Stranger Things episode 2x08. May credit go to all those who deserve it.

Chapter Six - Kill or Be Killed

As Steve pulls me through the entryway of the Byers' residence, we are immediately faced with who I recognize as Will's friends; his party. The four boys have been inseparable for as long as I can remember, having become fast friends in their early school years. Even so, of all of Will's friends, I have seen Mike around the most. Between my time at the Wheeler household when I was closer with Nancy, and Mike's time at the Byers', the two of us have met a hundred times more than I have ever met Dustin or Lucas.

At the moment, I think I hear Mike rambling on about some sort of army. He is charging down the hallway, hurrying directly for one of the bedrooms, with Dustin, Lucas, and a red-haired girl around their age in tow. I already have more questions. Fantastic. Steve's grip tightens around my arm and he tugs me along again, dragging me down the hallway after the kids.

As far as I can tell, Mike has led us all into Will's bedroom. He stands near a desk, waving around a drawing of Will's that appears to illustrate a giant, ominous spider.

"The shadow monster," Dustin breathes.

"It got Will that day on the field. The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him." Mike speaks as if we should all know exactly what he's talking about.

"And so, this virus, it's connecting him to the tunnels?" The red-haired girl questions with confused, unblinking eyes that suggest she doesn't fully understand our circumstances either.

"To the tunnels, monsters, the Upside Down, everything." Mike is frantic, almost excited.

Steve has let go of my arm at this point, standing at my side, the both of us close behind the younger group. "Whoa. Slow down. Slow down." He is almost as clueless and overwhelmed as me. I can't decide whether that's reassuring or infuriating.

Until now, the middle schoolers hadn't even so much as glanced at Steve and I since we entered the house. Abruptly they turn, all of them blinking between me and Steve, surprisingly unfazed by my arrival. Oh yes, they would have heard Steve yelling at me over the phone. My eyes lock briefly with the red-haired girl's as Mike establishes an attempt at explaining the situation.

"Okay, so, the shadow monster's inside everything. And if the vines feel something like pain, then so does Will."

"And so does Dart," Lucas interjects. Who the hell is Dart?

"Yeah. Like what Mr. Clarke taught us. The hive mind."

Steve and I are at a loss, exchanging a look before he vocalizes what we're thinking. "Hive mind?"

"A collective consciousness. It's a super-organism." Dustin imparts as if that's common knowledge.

"And this is the thing that controls everything. It's the brain." Mike adds.

"Like the mind flayer."

I can't keep quiet anymore. One way or another, I have managed to follow along thus far, but this all seems too mythical to be any form of truth. Steve and the red-haired girl are evidently in the same boat, as we speak together. "The what?"

Dustin groans like we're all stupid and begins a frenzied search of everything in Will's room. Who knows what he's looking for. Eventually, he grabs a sort of manual and pushes his way through us back into the hall.

As we move to accompany him in a swarm towards the kitchen, another bedroom door swings open to reveal the Police Chief, Jim

Hopper. Thanks to good old "Sherried Shelia", and the scum that she frequently surrounds herself with, the Chief and I have come into contact on numerous occasions.

"Hey, it's Jessie, right? You're Shelia's kid?" Hopper appears dismayed, understandably, but he's still given me a moment of his time.

"I'm her niece, yeah." I nod with a self-conscious smile. I really didn't come dressed for any of this.

"Right, yeah, you've got a different name... Harrington?"

"Harrison," I remind him, just as he blurts out Steve's last name in a harmless, yet embarrassing error.

Hearing my correction, he simply nods again and sets off down the hall. Following close behind, I catch him taking the briefest of glimpses at Steve before settling his attention on Dustin, who is now leaning over the kitchen table with the manual splayed open.

Apprehensively, I pause at the threshold of the kitchen, watching as everyone begins to gather around Dustin, and bracing for whatever absurdity he is about to share with us. Steve has taken his place at the table directly to the right of Dustin. Wondering where I have gone, he glances back in my direction, finds my gaze, and pulls me to his side with his troubled eyes.

As I step towards him, Mike, who I didn't even realize had left the pack, comes rushing in from another room, Jonathan and Nancy trailing behind him. Jonathan is glancing longingly over his shoulder back in the direction from which they came; the direction where Will must be. How had I missed them? As he turns his attention to the centre of the kitchen in front of him, he and Nancy speak in unison. "Jessie?"

Standing at Steve's side now, I simply smile shyly at the two of them and avert my gaze, focusing again on Dustin. I hadn't expected to see them here tonight either. Nancy leans over Dustin's other shoulder, and Mike moves next to me, as Dustin begins his lecture.

"The mind flayer." He states while pointing to the page on display.

"What the hell is that?" Hopper steals the words from my mouth.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension. It's so ancient that it doesn't even know its true home. It enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers." Dustin presents matter-of-factly.

Upon hearing this explanation, Hopper is losing his patience. "Oh my God, none of this is real."

I tune out of the conversation for a moment as I consider this. What if everything that Dustin says is true? What if the "mind flayer" is real? If we hurt it, anger it, its wrath will be apocalyptic. How can we possibly stop something so massive?

"What does it want?" Nancy and I ask simultaneously.

Dustin blinks. "To conquer us, basically. It believes it's the master race."

"Like the Germans?" Steve is obviously trying desperately to follow along; however, his analogy is a little off. I frown at him, but he doesn't notice, and Dustin corrects him before I get the chance.

"Uh, the Nazis?"

"Yeah, the Nazis."

"If the Nazis were from another dimension, totally. It views other races, like us, as inferior to itself."

"It wants to spread, take over other dimensions," Mike remarks, eyes wide.

It's Lucas who makes everything clear. "We are talking about the destruction of our world as we know it."

Flustered and panicked, Steve spins around to face the window as he runs a hand through his disheveled hair. "That's great. That's great. That's really great. Jesus!" Breaking away from the table in

exasperation, he drifts to the window perpendicular to the fridge. I follow and position myself next to him, both of us peering out into the unforgiving darkness beyond.

From behind us, the group nervously discusses whether or not we should kill the "mind flayer", and if we are to kill it, how its death could even be achieved. We're doomed, and I don't want to think about our situation anymore. At this point, it's kill or be killed, and as time goes on, it seems more and more likely that we're moving in the direction of death.

Beside me, Steve rests one hand on the window sill, and the other on his hip as he hangs his head. I peek up at him, willing him to look at me for comfort, but he keeps his eyes firmly fixed ahead when he whispers, "Bob is dead."

"What?" I gasp, and my stomach sinks somehow even farther than it has already sunk over the last few minutes. Bob Newby, Joyce Byers' new boyfriend, was, if nothing else, a good and compassionate man. He and Joyce were happy. Bob Newby did not deserve to die, and Joyce Byers does not deserve any of the anguish that Hawkins has thrown at her over the past year. Shivering, as a result of both my anxiety and the frigid draft of the window, I tighten my denim jacket around me.

"Mrs. Byers' boyfriend, I guess... he tried to save them... at Hawkins Lab." Steve gestures back towards Hopper and Mike, who are now engaged in a loud argument. My focus remains entirely on Steve. After a brief moment, he turns his head back and finally holds my gaze again. Why was Bob at Hawkins Lab? Was Steve there? Is that how he came to know who Bob was? What happened in the lab? Is that where the monsters live? Just as I am about to flood the space between us with questions, Mike's raised voice becomes impossible to ignore.

"It's already killed everybody in that lab."

Bob Newby is dead, and so are countless innocent people. Dustin and Lucas seem to stress Mike's point as I watch their mouths move, but my panic is deafening, and I am incapable of perceiving a word they say. I only snap out of it when Joyce Byers, wary and devastated,

unexpectedly enters the room.

"They're right. We have to kill it. I want to kill it."

Thank you for the follows, favourites, and over 1100 views! I appreciate you all so much. How am I doing so far? Please leave a review and let me know what you think, and stay tuned for Chapter 7.

7. Chapter Seven - Hidden

Disclaimer: This chapter contains direct quotes from Stranger Things episode 2x08. May credit go to all those who deserve it.

Chapter Seven - Hidden

This year will be my third year working at Melvald's General Store with Joyce Byers. I had started there a year before Will disappeared. My first day on the job, Joyce had greeted me with a maternal smile that had crushed my worries, and in her company, I had found myself at ease for the first time in a long time.

For reasons I never understood, my Aunt always kept herself at a distance from the Byers family and tried to convince me to do the same, so working with Joyce was the only time I really got to talk to her. She was generous, sweet, caring, all the things my Aunt was not, which made working with her, and living next to her, all the nicer.

Prior to Will's vanishing, and again in recent weeks, Joyce had shown off Will's drawings, hanging them proudly in the store's backroom. Her eyes lit up every time she looked at them, just as they did when she was with Bob, who had dropped into the store numerous times only to see her. Damn it, up until the last few days, Joyce had been the happiest I had seen her since Will was lost.

I had never asked Joyce about the terror surrounding Will's disappearance, but there was no way I was going to make her relive the trauma. Watching her breakdown had been... difficult. I had covered many of her shifts while she was off trying to find him. Joyce's entire world revolves around her sons, and I am completely confident that she would do anything to keep them safe. As far as I was concerned, it was her devotion and commitment to finding Will that had ultimately saved his life.

Initially, I was too heartbroken by my own loss to concern myself with Will or even Barb for that matter, but as my wounds began to heal, I started to theorize. However, being so far out of the loop meant that I never got any answers. Barb is still lost, and I'm not

entirely convinced she can be found. She's been gone for so much longer than Will was... but that doesn't mean we should give up on her. Barb was my friend too. My ties with her had been broken, and she had always been closer to Nancy, but why the hell does that matter now? All I know is that Will had been lost, he had been dead, then he had been found.

The sight of Will, lying on the sofa, pale, and unconscious before me, makes my stomach flip, yet again, and breaks me out of my reverie. Obliviously, I have drifted along with the crowd, all of us following Mike out of the kitchen to observe Will.

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore. That he's a spy for the mind flayer now." The red-haired girl raises an eyebrow.

"Yeah, but he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is," Mike replies.

It is decided that they are going to destroy the shed and rearrange it into an unrecognizable environment. Then, they will interrogate Will and/or the demon possessing him. That sounds easier said than done.

Wasting no time, Hopper bursts through the front door and storms outside with Mike close behind. Hopper flings the shed door open and immediately begins to drag out the contents, chucking it into a disorganized pile in the yard.

When I hear the sounds of Mike closing the door behind him and stepping back into the room, I pull my eyes away from the window and let them fall on Will again, as tears threaten to stream down my cheeks. How had I hidden away from this family for so long? I may have been suffering, but what's happening in this town is so much bigger than all of us, so much more than one family can handle. For the first time since hearing Steve's voice through my phone, I am truly grateful for his call. Jesus, I really had abandoned everyone and I'm done wallowing in self-pity.

Jonathan adjusts infinitesimally next to me, shifting his weight between his feet, with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders slumped. Cautiously, I lift a hand and place it gently on his back. At the contact, he turns to face me, our eyes glistening at each other.

"I'm so sorry, Jonathan." I breathe, unable to raise my voice much louder than a whisper.

During our moment, Joyce had come to stand at Jonathan's other side. Swallowing, I blink over at her, keeping my hand on Jonathan out of the fear that if I let go, both of us will fall to the floor.

"Joyce, I'm so... you don't deserve any of this."

Joyce places a hand over the one I have on Jonathan and pulls us both into an embrace. "Thank you for coming, Jessie."

Blinking again to stop myself from sobbing, I catch a glimpse of Steve over Joyce's shoulder. I wouldn't have come here if it weren't for him. The fragile smile he sends in my direction tells me he knows it, and he's no longer remorseful for getting me involved.

After a beat, we break away, and as Jonathan and Joyce move to the exit, the rest of the group breaks into teams and goes after them to tackle the various jobs needed to be fulfilled in order to transform the shed.

Striding back out into the forbidding evening, I am hit with a chill, but my determination to do my part to help my neighbours draws me in the direction of the shed. The open door reveals a glow just ahead of Steve and Nancy, who slip into the room before me. The small wooden space seems cavernous and strange in its empty state.

The three of us work in an awkward silence, Nancy ripping duct tape, and Steve up on a step stool while armed with the staple gun, as I hold piece after piece of cardboard and fabric flat against the walls. Eventually, it is Nancy who ends the quietness, peeking up at Steve between tape rips.

"Hey, what you did, helping the kids, that was really cool." She smirks gratefully at him, and he pauses, nodding.

"Yeah. Those little shits are real trouble, you know?"

"Believe me, I know." Nancy smiles widely at the floor, but when she glances back up at Steve hoping the tension had been broken, he not looking at her, but stapling without a trace of a smile on his face. Her

attention quickly turns to me as Steve continues to click and thunk above us.

Nancy's eyes bore into mine, screaming in confusion and concern. If I were in her position, I wouldn't know what to say or think either. Steve's shortness should not be a surprise to her, but she's likely worried about him, and I know she's wondering how I got involved. Even so, she doesn't ask. Just as her lips part to vocalize her perplexity, Dustin trudges in carrying another armful of trash to adorn the walls with.

As always, thank you for reading, and stay tuned for Chapter 8.

8. Chapter Eight - This Far

Disclaimer: This chapter contains direct references to moments in both season 1 and 2 of Stranger Things. May credit go to all those who deserve it.

Chapter Eight - This Far

After a while, the shed is gone and replaced with an unrecognizable interrogation room. As Jonathan steps in with Will in his arms, I take one last look at him and Joyce, and tread out into the bone-chilling cold of the night, leaving them, Hopper, and Mike to do whatever they can to save Will. I cross the lawn briskly, not fearing the dark so much as what might linger in it, and swiftly open the door back into the Byers' residence.

Inside, Lucas and the redhead girl sit facing each other in a hallway, while Dustin is seated in the kitchen, Nancy rests on a wall nearby, and Steve stands in the room to her right, swinging a baseball bat adorned with nails. I keep my eyes down, not wanting to draw attention to myself, and stride towards him. Now is as good a time as any to try for more answers. Despite what I think, before I even get a chance to say a word to Steve, Dustin shuffles his way into the room behind me, nearly shivering with nervous energy.

"Hey Steve, I didn't know you had a sister." Oh shit, Dustin had overheard Hopper's earlier mistake.

"What?" Steve squints, and his eyebrows knit until he remembers. "No, you idiot, she's not my sister." He aims his bat at me as he speaks.

"We've met before, you probably just don't remember. I'm Jessica." I smile sweetly at Dustin and sink down to the ground, positioning myself up against the wall closest to the door. I can still see out into the hall and the kitchen beyond.

"Harrison," Steve articulates with slight aggression. "She's a friend."

Dustin grins slyly. "Wow Steve, that was fast. Weren't you just telling me a few hours ago that Nancy was different, how she's special?"

Steve cocks his head to one side, eyeing Dustin with a "what's your point" expression. Quickly, I glance out into the hall to make sure Nancy hadn't heard the mention of her name. If she had, this could get awkward. To my relief, she carries on staring solemnly into the distance, drowning in her own thoughts.

"Oh, I get it, you're pretending not to care." Dustin winks conspiratorially. "I mean you clearly don't care about this girl; you yelled at her on the phone, on the lawn, and now you've brought her into the house of doom." In response, Steve rolls his eyes like he's being mocked.

"I know enough about what's going on to protect myself." I try to stand up for myself and clear the air, feeling like I'm missing out on some weird inside joke. I'm not entirely sure I believe the words that come out of my mouth.

Dustin simply blinks at me, nods slowly, and turns to leave. When he has returned to the kitchen to continue his incessant pacing, Steve steps towards me and slides his body down the wall to my left, crunching sheets of paper as he seats himself beside me. One leg outstretched, the other bent up at the knee, he drops his weapon and reaches into a pocket of his jacket to retrieve a lighter. Absentmindedly, he flips it open, either out of nervous habit or boredom. I've never seen him smoke, and I wonder if he does at home, or at parties.

"So... are you going to let me in on the joke?" I ask lightly, breaking the awkward pause in the conversation and halting Steve's repetitive clicking. He sighs, staring down at his lap, and I allow myself to really take him in for the first time since I had arrived at the Byers'. There are remnants of dirt on his jeans, and blood maybe. He is tired, ragged, and damn it... beautiful.

"It's really not... yeah okay. I've already dragged you this far."

"I came when you called," I say simply, and he turns his head to face me, his eyes searching mine for an answer as to why I had done just

that.

"Now please, how did you end up in all this?" I flail my hands around, gesturing to the room around us.

"Last year, the fight. I know you remember."

"I do." Everyone had heard about it, at least through rumor. Now I was about to get the story right from the source.

"I was jealous. I had seen Nancy in her room, alone with Jonathan. I told her to go to hell. Nancy. I jumped off the deep end. I insulted Jonathan, his family, provoked him to fight me. He had me pinned to the ground until the cops came and chased us off. I ran away with Tommy and Carol, then drove away from them when they wouldn't stop insulting Nancy."

"Hmm, a good decision." I nod at Steve.

"They're assholes. They never cared about Nancy. God, that stupid spray paint." Steve shook his head and groaned. "I regretted everything, so I went back to the theatre and cleaned up the mess myself. Then, I went to the Byers' to apologize to Jonathan. Nancy was there, so I tried to apologize to her, only she ended up holding me at gunpoint."

"What?! She couldn't have meant to actually hurt you."

"I hadn't meant to hurt her either, but no. She was just trying to get me to leave. That's when the monster broke through the ceiling."

"The Demogorgon."

"I couldn't understand why they weren't screaming. It was disgusting, a man crossed with some sort of... of devilish Venus flytrap." Steve's eyes were wide now as he recalled his first meeting with the beast. "I panicked, who wouldn't. Why weren't they? I mean they had a plan. Somehow, they were expecting it. So, we hid, then it disappeared somewhere, and I tried to call the police, to get help. Nancy just told me to leave, tried to warn me that it would come back."

"But you didn't leave. You stayed to fight." I didn't have to ask. This is

what he had meant by "every time I try to apologize to this girl, I end up fighting demons!" Steve nods, brushing the hair out of his face as he gazes into the middle distance. Returning his lighter to his jacket pocket and picking up his bat from his side, he waves it weakly in front of him.

"I almost didn't though. I got all the way out to my car, but when the lights flickered and I knew it was coming back, I just went straight back in and fought. I led it to a trap in the hall and Jonathan set fire to it."

I am rendered speechless. I have so much to say, but I can't say anything. I was right, Steve is changing. He could have run away like he was told, saved his own skin, but something inside him had told him to stay, to fight, to protect someone other than himself. This is all insane; monsters from another universe, flickering lights, spiked bats... Suddenly, Steve chuckles and I am brought back into the present.

"Seriously Jessie, you live next door. How did you not hear any of that?" I laugh, and it feels good, to smile with Steve, but he has a serious point. Was I honestly that deaf?

"Okay so that's how you got involved, thank you. Now how did you end up here?" I question, pointing directly at the ground beneath us. "Where did you find Nancy and Jonathan together? Again I guess."

"Yesterday, or whatever day it was, when I found Dustin instead of Nancy, he asked if I still had the bat," Steve explained, waving the bat again, this time in the direction of Dustin, still pacing in the kitchen. "Then he forced me to help him look for his lizard."

"His lizard." Really?

"Well, Dart, who I thought was a lizard, but actually turned out to be a Demodog or whatever dumb name we're calling them."

"Dustin kept one of the monsters as a pet? That's disgusting! And stupid! Why the hell would he do that?" I was shocked, honestly thinking Dustin would know better.

"He wanted to impress a girl. Max, uh, the redhead."

"So that's her name. Something tells me his plan didn't work out too well."

"No. I did give the kid some relationship advice though, which is I guess where the whole "joke" comes in."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, just told him to act like he didn't care."

"Wow, yeah that's definitely going to help him get a girl. Great job." My tone drips with sarcasm until something dawns on me. "Wait, Dustin heard you yelling at me, knows I'm not your sister, and now thinks we're an item?"

"Yeah." Steve shrugs, and by the strange look on his face, I can't tell whether or not he regrets giving Dustin the advice. He should. I think. I decide to brush it off rather than think too much about it.

"Okay whatever, I'm sure he'll forget about all that after tonight. If we survive. How could Dustin not have known Dart was a Demodog?"

"He said that when he found the thing, it was small, like a slug. Then it started molting and ate his cat apparently."

I scrunch my nose in disgust and horror. Steve exhales and continues. "He tried to lock the damn thing in a cellar, but it molted again and tunneled out. We left a trail of meat leading to a junkyard Dustin figured would be a good place to lure it in. Lucas and Max met up with us."

"You set a trap, but the trap didn't hold?"

"Dart didn't even take the bait. By the time he had caught up with us, he was sick of the meat, so I added myself to the menu." Steve clenched his fist tighter around his bat.

"Steve!"

"The kids kept a lookout from an abandoned bus. We had expected to

catch Dart, not start a war with an entire army."

"You could have all died. You protected the kids, probably saved their lives."

"Barely. The dogs kept coming after me, they nearly busted through the bus door, until they were summoned away. We found them at Hawkins Lab."

"Nancy and Jonathan too I'm guessing."

"Yes, looking for Mike and Will. Hopper and Joyce were there too, they were attacked, but you already know about that."

"Yes." I didn't want to think about that anymore; the suffering, the heartache, the blood, the tears, the damage, the death, of what must have been the scene of the onslaught.

With Steve's story concluded, the silence had returned, and we sat in it together, both gazing blankly at the wall beyond us. In an effort to relax, I separate my hands, which had been clenched tightly together in my lap. I shift to rest them on the floor at my sides, not looking when my left-hand does not touch the floor but finds itself delicately atop Steve's free hand. I twitch and peek up at Steve, who studies my hand upon his, equally stunned. As I am about to pull away, wordlessly, he twists his hand palm up and folds his fingers around mine.

"Thank you," I whisper, feeling a blush burn softly at my cheeks. "Thank you for telling me everything."

Steve smirks, "don't thank me yet, we've..."

An unexpected flickering of lights interrupts him. His hand still around mine, Steve pulls me up from the floor and drags me through the house again until everyone inside is gathered at the window facing the shed. Then the flickering stops, the lights returning to their usual glow, and my heart thuds. The stillness, the noiselessness, is deafening. Was Will coming back, or was he already gone? The grip I have on Steve's hand is released abruptly when Hopper busts through the front door.

Thank you so much for reading! I can't believe I have almost reached 3000 views. My apologies for the delay and I hope the wait was worth it. Still enjoying the story? Please leave me a review, I would love to hear what you all think. Stay tuned for Chapter Nine.

9. Chapter Nine - Looking Out

Disclaimer: This chapter contains direct quotes from Stranger Things episode 2x08 and 2x09. May credit go to all those who deserve it.

Chapter Nine - Looking Out

"Close gate."

Hopper had barged in because he had figured that Will, even in his possessed state, was talking to us. By translating a Morse code message, we had discovered that not only was he talking, but he was also giving us instructions.

"Gate? What gate?" I ask no one in particular. My question is left unanswered when the shrill ring of the Byers' telephone sounds off like an alarm. Without a beat, Nancy stands from her chair and storms over, rips the phone from the wall, and smashes it onto the ground.

"It's just a phone. It could be anywhere. Right?" Steve tries unsuccessfully to put us at ease. He is quickly proven wrong when a low growl is carried from the direction of the front door and echoes throughout the house. Terrified, we crowd into the Byers' front room. The kids move to keep watch on the couch at the window, while Nancy, Steve, and I stand in a line along the back wall.

"They're coming!" Mike yells, suddenly bursting into the room and taking a place near Nancy. Joyce and Jonathan quickly follow behind, both of them passing through as Jonathan carries an unconscious Will to his bedroom. Minutes later, Hopper marches in holding firearms.

"Hey, get away from the windows!" Hopper yells at the kids, then turns to Jonathan, who has swiftly returned from Will's room with Joyce.

"Can you use this?" He demands, gesturing a gun towards him.

"I can," Nancy answers confidently. Hopper tosses it to her and she catches it, loads it, and aims. She seems almost prepared for this unpredictable situation, and I'm stunned. Then I remember, she had armed herself against a Demogorgon before.

I step up to nestle myself at Steve's shoulder, wishing I could take his hand again. He stands his ground, gripping his bat firmly in both hands, ready to swing at a moment's notice. All of us facing the window, we wait for... what? War? The anxiety in the air palpable, and I'm choking on it.

"Where are they? What are they doing?" Nancy calls out, as the noise seems to travel across the front of the house. We gasp and shift to maintain aim in its direction, following its every move. Occasionally, the growls become fewer growls, and more screeches or screams, as if the monster is already being attacked, though none of us have yet to catch a glimpse of it.

Abruptly, the noise stops altogether. Then both the silence, and the window, are shattered as the monster crashes through and tumbles onto the floor. I am frozen; the Demogorgon, Demodog, Democreature, whatever it is, is disgusting, and somehow worse than the image I had drawn up based on Steve's rough description. Everyone turns to aim their weapons at it, but no one shoots or swings. After a second, Hopper slowly and cautiously stalks towards it.

"Is it dead?" Max asks what we are all thinking, to no response. Hopper gives it a cautious kick and it doesn't move. It has to be dead, right?

Collectively, our attention is drawn away from the demon at our feet when, by some means, the chain on the front door is unlocked without anyone touching it. The door creaks open gradually to reveal a young girl, probably twelve or thirteen years old, with slicked-back hair, and dark eye makeup. She looks like a punk with a serious, yet sad, expression on her face and blood dripping from her nose.

The room remains stunned into silence, as we watch the girl stride towards Mike, who has emerged from the crowd. He is drawn to her like he has been waiting forever for her; like she had left him and he

had missed her more than anything in the world.

"Who is she?" I whisper to Steve, who blinks at me, raises his eyebrows cluelessly, then blinks back to her.

After the mysterious, magical girl, who they call Eleven, has been briefed on the situation, it is decided that we must attempt to separate the Mind Flayer from Will. Somehow, we are to burn it out of him, while Eleven tries to close the gate to The Upside Down, where the Mind Flayer is from, which apparently, she opened in the first place. Who the hell is this girl? Is she some sort of mage? I honestly wouldn't be surprised at this point.

Jesus! This is great, sick, none of this sounds insane at all. Every normal teenager experiences a time when they find themselves entrusting a strange young girl to close the door to another dimension, while an exorcism is simultaneously being performed on their next-door neighbour. I'm holding a hand over my mouth and trying not to scream out of both exhaustion and panic as I tread out into the Byers' yard.

We all have our parts to play if we have any chance of saving Will, and effectively, all of Hawkins. My job is to rummage through the mound of stuff that was once storage from the shed to help Nancy and Steve, who are already trudging towards the pile, find a heater that may be used to warm up Will.

As I walk towards them, I notice Jonathan, Hopper with Will in his arms, and Joyce, leave the Byers' house and rush to Jonathan's Ford. They will be relocating to an unfamiliar cabin in the woods in another attempt to confuse the Mind Flayer, and give Will more of a fighting chance. I shake my head, try not to worry too much, and take a deep breath of the crisp night air to clear my head as I arrive at the shed pile and flick on a flashlight. Nancy, Steve, and I quietly search the debris, looking only at the assorted items before us, not saying a word.

"You should go with him." Steve unexpectedly speaks up.

"What?" Nancy asks, and I know that she knows exactly what he's

talking about, but she still had to ask.

"With Jonathan."

"No. I'm not just going to leave Mike." She shakes her head like the thought is ridiculous.

"No one's leaving anyone. I may be a pretty shitty boyfriend, but turns out I'm actually a pretty damn good babysitter." Steve speaks almost with confidence; almost. He has shifted around closer to Nancy, and together they have discovered the heater we were all searching for. Steve lifts it up and looks between it, and Nancy.

"Steve..." Nancy's eyes are glossy and bore into Steve's. She's tired, scared, and torn.

"It's okay Nance; it's okay." Steve encourages, and his eyes are glossy too, but it's different; he's letting her go. It's almost as if while he's trying to reassure Nancy, he's also trying to reassure himself that he will be okay without her. It's like he's learning to accept, and understand, her choosing Jonathan. My stomach sinks, and I blink back my own tears as I watch them hold each other's gaze for a moment. Steve then hands the heater to Nancy, turns, and heads back in the direction of the house. Nancy stands unmoving, studying the ground, and takes a breath.

"Don't worry, I'll watch over him while you're away." I offer her compassion, and a half-smile, though I can't bring myself to make eye contact just yet.

"What happened between the two of you while I was gone?" She whispers.

"That's just it, you were gone." I answer, "you were all he had and then you left. I found him, or he found me, I'm not sure. At the time, we were vulnerable in our own ways. I confided in him, he in I, and now I think we're stuck looking out for each other."

"Is that why he called you and dragged you into all this? So he could protect you? Does he honestly believe that pulling you into the danger is the best way to keep you safe?" Nancy's voice rises in

bewilderment.

I raise my eyebrows and shrug; I can't claim to know what his exact reasons were. We are in this together now regardless. Nancy sighs and continues, "I'm so sorry I cut you out, you never deserved that. You were always there for me; for everyone around me."

"I'm not going anywhere." I meet her eyes for the first time since we started this conversation and hold her gaze firmly until I'm convinced she knows I'm being serious, and she nods with a reply.

"If we make it through tonight, I promise I will tell you everything."

Thank you to all my loyal followers for your patience! I'm amazed that my story has been viewed over 6000 times now. Thank you all so much, and hello to my lovely new followers. Your reviews are always welcome. Please stay tuned for Chapter 10! I'm particularly excited about the chapters to come.